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MORE LETTERS FROM BILLY

MORE LETTERS FROM BILLY

BY THE AUTHOR OF "A SUNNY SUBALTERN: BILLY'S LETTERS FROM FLANDERS"

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DEDICATED TO MY DEAR SISTERS

ELSIE AND ISABEL

PREFACE

A kind and appreciative public is responsible for the publication of "More Letters from Billy."

May I take this opportunity of thanking the readers of "A Sunny Subaltern" for their very gratifying interest in Billy's welfare, as evidenced by the numerous inquiries which have reached me from far and near.

If these further letters from Billy may, in however small a degree, succeed in amusing the hours of relaxation or relieving those of languour, pain and anxiety in these strenuous, stirring, saddening times, the warmest wish of my heart will have been fulfilled.

"BILLY'S MOTHER."

MORE LETTERS FROM BILLY

More Letters from Billy

2nd London General,
St. Marks College,
Chelsea, London.

Dear Mother,—

Just a few lines to tell you I'm coming along pretty well. I was hit in the leg with shrapnel, and knocked unconscious with shell concussion. At present after two weeks I am some better, but still very weak and my memory is very nearly gone—I can only recollect things with great difficulty and my mind seems to be a blank as to what happened for many days after. I have constant pain in my head and down my spine and my left arm is partially paralysed, but they tell me I'll be jake again

sometime. When I get out of hospital I will have to be passed upon by a Medical Board and be given leave of absence—sometimes it is three months. I don't think I should afford to go home to Canada—however, will see what you think, and if I cable you, reply C/o Bank of Montreal here and I'll get it. I'll write more again possibly to-morrow. Love to all, including yourself most. BILLY.

Manor House.

My Dear Mother,—

As you will see I've changed my address —I was boarded and given five weeks leave from July 12th, which is not much, but better than less, of course. So that means no trip to Canada.

Lady D. looked up this place for me and it is a wonderful spot. My hostess is Lady ——— and some noise over here—a delightful old lady, who since my arrival this morning has hovered over me like a shadow.

She asks me to say that although she does not know you she is pleased to look after me and will write you later on.

I will write and tell you all about the place when I've had a better chance—I came in a hurry, was sort of hustled off on a few hours notice by those bustling, busy women at the Canadian Red Cross. I had to hurry up and buy clothes and all manner of things, as nearly all my kit has been lost "Somewhere." Just what my plans are from here I cannot say, but I will stay here four weeks. It's quiet and a beautiful old house, set in a garden that is wonderful—more anon.

I have a valet of "me own," just like T. Tembarom, and there's a Rolls Royce at my disposal—a menu for meals, lunch anyway to-day, which consisted of macaroni, lamb chops, peas, and new potatoes, gathered at dawn, artichokes like Aunty likes, fresh raspberry tart, clutch cream one didn't need to whip and a glass of port seventy five years

old, which I was compelled to drink to "give you blood, my dear." That's a fair start, Eh? However I feel better already and am going to do nothing but loaf and write, so look for long screeds.

I don't think there is anything else, my dear, to tell you; I'm doing as well as can be expected, and the rest and quiet is what I need, so perhaps I may be well when my leave is up. I will write you more fully about everything—there's really nothing more now, so good-bye with love in heaps,

BILLY.

Manor House.

My Dear Mother,—

I cannot for the life of me understand how or why I do not receive any mail from you. I've only had one letter since the middle of May and that was to the Hospital, dated June 28th, I think. I feel certain that you've written oftener than that, but I

surely cannot get any trace of them. And it's very weary waiting, I assure you. For after all, that's the only tie I have to Canada—letters, and when they fail, one feels sort of isolated.

I'm quite happy here, but still it's not just like home. There's a certain restraint, altho' the dear good soul is as kind as can be, but her manners and customs are English and of the real aristocracy. Her niece is Lady in Waiting to the Queen, and she is a sister to Lady ———, and all her visitors are Sirs, etc., and you're continually forgetting whether to say "Good day, my Lord, or How is your Ladyship this morning?" and crashing out with "Good morning, Mrs. Jones, and did you rest amicably with your pillow?"

Then, as I told you, there is a valet for me. He is one of those intimate devils who took my meagre belongings and unpacked them—a pair of shoes, some soiled collars and a dirty khaki shirt. I've somehow never

forgiven him for that. Some way my bedroom has always been my own, but now I feel uncertain whether I should ask him if I may come in or not. I went up this morning and he actually wasn't there. It was so nice for a minute—for he heard me, although I gumshoed around I'm sure—and appeared.

He absolutely haunts that spot—if one takes out a cigarette before the case is closed he is there with a lighted match, and I do so love to light my own cigarettes. I think I'll ask him to let me blow out the match one of these times. Of course, I suppose it's very jake, but when one is used to hustling around for oneself it's really perturbing to have some one sort of derrick an undershirt on you. But I fooled him yesterday morning when he came in to waken me. I said "Good morning, Smith—I feel quite tired this morning and think I'll sleep for a while. I don't want any breakfast." This in my best patrician tone. "Very good, Sir, at

what time shall I have the bawth?" I felt like saying—Go to Hell—but heroically refrained, said "about 11.00" and rolled over. As soon as I felt he was downstairs I lit a cigarette and stealthily arose. Ah! what a treat. In absolute peace and solitude I dressed and shaved, dispensing for the nonce with the "bawth." I really felt quite elated at my cleverness. When I went for my boots I found both pairs were out, so had to ring. His face was worth the price of admission alone when he saw me all dressed up but coat and shoes. "But, Sir, you should have rung, Sir," as though the Germans had reached London, and I never smiled as I said,—serenely I hope, "Oh! I changed my mind; I'll be down to breakfast." I couldn't admit I had really defeated him for fear he should swoon.

Well, then, there's the Butler, a solemn visaged, heavy-jowled person with white hair, silent pedal extremities, a cultivated accent, which is delightful, largely because

of the "aitches" which nimbly leave one word to appear on another. He is a real mean party I'm sure, and I know watches me with expectant hope that I shall choose the wrong fork for the salad, thereby causing him great glee. But to see him work is a revelation. I'll bet if he saw a "hasher" in a quick lunch counter pick up eighteen plates, eleven saucers with a platoon of knives, forks and spoons, to say nothing of a setting of cups and clatter off, he would certainly have a hemorrhage of green paint. One dish at a time for him, with unction, and gravity, just as if it were a religious ceremony, the passing of a silver vegetable dish of green peas. I'll bet the vestal virgins of Rome were no more careful with the sacred fuel.

Lady —— was obliged to go away on Red Cross work the other day and I was left alone. I roamed the garden till lunch and then, ah then! I would fain visualise for you the scene, but I fear me I fail.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

THE BUTLER

me

ACT I

Scene I. A Library, Door centre, Fireplace right, French window left opening onto a green velvet lawn banked by kaleidoscopic beds of flowers stretching into green hills, dolce far niente. Without, the sonorous roll of a gorgeous gong (I've seen it and know).

THE BUTLER *(entering door c)* (with unction): "Luncheon is served, sir."

me (*Meekly and with great feeling*): "Very well."

Scene II. A Dining Room, the largest in history, so large one loses their way in finding a township of glistening white

tablecloth divided into sections and dotted with silver. The room is lined with huge affairs made of mahogany and between silver and cut glass is intended to give the effect of the crystal room in Tiffany's. The poor hero falteringly takes his place, the only one, at the L., thereby accentuating the expanse of white linen.

THE BUTLER
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THE BUTLER
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N. B. The Management desire to point out to patrons the extreme brilliancy of the dialogue in this scene. Its freshness, its crisp effervescence, coupled with its sparkling wit, and scintillating epigram, stamp it as one of the premier pieces of dramatic writing extant.

CURTAIN

But, my dear, can you imagine me being served to a six-course luncheon alone and not one word was *said?* If you took a mouthful of water, the faithful automaton filled the glass again, and when you took the last bite of any dish, as silently as those Arabs of Longfellow's, that dish stole or was stolen away. My God, I felt like screaming once or twice.

I am feeling much better, although my leg still drags, particularly when I am tired. If I walk far, I get quite weak and really have no desire to bestir myself at all. I putter around the garden, pull a weed here

and there, but don't accomplish very much. However, I feel that this is the place for me, and am certain ere my leave is up, I'll be better—at least able for light duty.

You know, my dear, my memory is really shocking, and I can't remember for the life of me whether I sent you that cheque in the last letter or not. I have an empty stub with no entry on it, so cannot be sure. However, here is one now. The reason for the need of any money was when I arrived in London I had a pair of pyjamas and that was all I could wear. My uniform was ripped to pieces, as well as my clothes, and the boots I'd worn had been lost in the shuffle. I waited as long as I could, hoping my kit would be sent from France, but it never came—in fact, has not arrived yet, so I had to purchase a complete new outfit —one uniform, underwear, shirts, collars, ties, boots, socks, cap, etc., and the cost was damnable. I didn't buy anything I could help—but three pairs of socks, two shirts,

two suits of underwear and one pair of boots, and one cap. These, with the other things, ran away with a vast amount of money, and when I got leave I was obliged to buy a suit of mufti, that is civilian clothes, and attendant accessories, as we are supposed to take our leave in them. I only got what I really needed, but between one thing and another, it made £25 look very small indeed, and as I could not come down here without money, felt I had to draw. However, I've put in a claim for lost kit and will get back, I guess, £15 of it anyway, maybe more.

Well, my dear, I must close, as tea is about to be served.

Give my love to all and do write soon; address me care Bank of Montreal, 9 Waterloo Place, London, S. W.

Heaps of Love,

BILLY.

Manor House.

My dear Mother,—

I have just come back after a trip to London in search of mail, lost kit, etc., and in the former case have done very well. I found awaiting me in the Record Office about forty letters from every one I ever heard of, including three from yourself, dated June 8th, 15th and 26th, all, of course, before you had received my note.

Well, my dear, I was glad that you were not too worried, and that my cable from Boulogne allayed any anxiety you may have had. I cannot imagine just how every one wrote me—it seems marvellous, and for the publicity I received, as you say, I cannot understand that either, or how they got my address changed from 436. That was the reason I cabled there, because I figured the word would go there, anyway. I really don't remember cabling, but always on my person was a 20-franc note with instructions

to cable there, so I guess subconsciously I had some one do it.

Well, my dear, as you will see, I am still with Lady ——, and while I had the little two-days' trip to London, I really like the country. I am getting better quickly, and I suppose in ten days will have to go back to Shorncliffe and then on to France, after a time. They are giving no long leave nowadays, and hustling chaps back as quickly as possible. It is rumoured that Canadians are to be taken down to the Somme for the push now on, and I fear there will be many casualties before they change the drive to some other sector. Pleasant thoughts, eh?

Of course, I don't really think I'm fit enough to go back yet, although I'm much better—my leg doesn't drag now unless I'm very tired, although it is rather slow and stiff, and I still have violent headaches. If I have the least excitement, away she goes and pounds like a trip-hammer. Also my

"sleepery" is on the blink—I get only about two hours a night, and it never seems to improve very much. I have such restless nights—all nightmare and dreams—so one doesn't feel very fresh in the morning. However, I guess everything will turn out O. K., but I must say candidly, I do not feel like facing the music at once.

I am sending you some post-cards of one of the most famous castles in England, situated near here, and we motored over to see it one day last week. It dates back to Henry VII's time, and was a Royalist stronghold in the time of Cromwell. It is, indeed, a wonderful old place, with secret passages and dungeons, etc. It is the home of the Marquis of N——, and I simply revelled there all one afternoon from dungeon to keep, smelling the musty smells, peering into this room, climbing a dim, steep stair, only to find I had just come from the room a moment before by one of the devious turns. I shall never forget that after-

noon, and as we chugged back in the evening sun I could not pen for you the varied thoughts that came and went.

Well, my dear, I really think I must close —I have no more news, anyway, and I want to try and write another letter or two to catch the Canadian mail. Love to all, with heaps for yourself.

Believe me, your son, who candidly wishes he were back home—not patriotic, but human.

BILLY.

Dear Mother,—

Just received your letter of Sept. 2nd and apparently there are some in between somewhere, as certain things do not connect up properly.

I received a parcel of sox from A. S. yesterday, and two pairs from you with some hankies—thanks very much. I have several pairs in good shape now, so please do not send any more for a time.

I expect to leave this place in a few days, possibly the 1st of the month. I am a lot better, and may be sent back to the front soon. God wot I am not mad about it, but I suppose it has to be, so we'll stick to it. However, my leg is better, also my heart, and my general health improved, so I trust I'll be all right. G. is in this hospital and also B.—both our officers—there are only about four of the original quota with the battalion now—all the rest killed or wounded.

I am getting fearfully fed up, as they say here, with hospital and London, and will be glad to get out to camp life again. It surely is much healthier, and I feel better, although France, as I've said before, is none too like a health resort.

I saw the Zeppelin fall the other night, and it looked a good sight, I can tell you. A lurid flame in the black amid the bright spots in the clouds of hundreds of concentrated searchlights, with the roar of the anti-

aircraft guns. It certainly raised a cheer from the thousands who throng the streets when a Zepp attack warning is given. Thousands walk about till the raid has subsided, listening to the alternate whirr of the Zepps in between the boom of the guns. All the searchlights sweep the sky till they pick up the machine, then concentrate on it. It resembles nothing so much as a silver cigar, despite the fact that it is over six hundred feet long. One they brought down is intact, almost ready to go up again, I hear. I hope they use it and that it straafes old Fritz properly.

Well, dear, as I say, I hope to be out in a few days, and will likely go with the —— Battalion, Shorncliffe, but address mail as usual to the Record Office, C. E. F. No. 3, Holborn St., London.

Love to all, and write soon.

BILLY.

Once more,
Somewhere.

My Dear Mother,—

As you will see, I'm back again with the Battalion. We arrived this morning, after a long train journey, and expect to go up to the support line to-night. We are in a very quiet part of the line, I understand, and the surroundings don't seem too bad.

From what I can gather, there does not seem to be much chance of promotion here, even with all the senior casualties, as they imported another Commanding Officer, who is bringing in men he knows, and I figure that things are not going to be any better than they were before.

Well, my dear, there isn't very much to tell, as I've had no chance to judge conditions—however, I'm feeling fairly fit, and will doubtless keep on doing so until I endeavour to stop a shell in motion, a proceeding in which no human has so far been really successful.

I sent you a picture post-card the other day, and hope you received same O. K.

By the way, my dear, you will doubtless have noticed how many men are missing nowadays. Well, I can only say if you ever get word that I'm missing, just make up your mind I'm gone. I don't want to cause any anxiety, but from a knowledge of conditions, I think you need not hope against hope, as usually one is never found, and I realise it only prolongs the agony if one is waiting for the word that never comes. So, my dear, just forget about me if you ever get that word. In any event, if I do get bumped off, you'll be better off than now. That's speaking, of course, from a mercenary standpoint, otherwise you'll understand I've only tried to do my bit. I haven't any M.C. or V.C., and don't ever expect one, but when you see the number of people in England with three and four of their family gone and also nearly every woman in France in mourning, you'll un-

derstand one life more or less is not even an atom in this present maelstrom.

Now, my dear, just address me c/o Battalion, C.E.F., France; leave brigade, etc., off; also send me socks again—make some with extra long feet so that I can wear them over another pair without being tight.

Write often, and if I'm wounded again address mail c/o Record Office, London.

Heaps of love,

BILLY.

In the Field (of mud).

Dear Mother,—

Your letter of Oct. 4th just to hand. I am at a loss to understand where my letters can have got to—I have written at least once every eight days, usually in time to catch a mail, that is, from England, and certainly all the time I was in hospital. Of course, mail is being closely censored now and God only knows what the powers who

open the mail bags do with the letters, although I really believe that they can't take any great personal interest in them, so perhaps they heave them into a forgotten pile and in due course one may get them—in any event, it is very annoying both ways.

As you will know from my last letter, I'm back with the Battalion again, and the Hun right here is our least worry. He is a quiet, unobtrusive, war-wearied Bosche, who holds the line opposite us and apparently is content to remain so. He heaves over practically no shells, save a number of trench mortar bombs, and his most detestable minenwarfers, or minnies. These are not, of course, what you could call life-saving objects, but they travel very slowly, and one can see them coming quite distinctly, so learns to dodge them with great speed and precision. They make a hole about five feet deep and five by nine feet wide, so if they hit you, it's good-bye, boys!

However, as I say, he, the Bosche, is our

least worry, but we have one of giant proportions. By the way, it seems to be one of a soldier's necessities—if it isn't one thing, it's another. This time it is mud—and what mud—genuine, thick, gluey mud, with excellent body and bouquet—Phew!! Some bouquet. Also, I may add, that there's no lack of it. You see, it has rained incessantly for aeons, it seems, and I give you my word, the trenches actually dissolved before my sceptical eyes, until now they are really "in solution," as a chemist would say. I can assure you that never in my wildest dreams did I picture such a state as we are in—I'm sure you would never recognise me should you behold me now. I'm caked in mud, juicy and wet to the hips, while above are liberal applications, until I resemble a bride's first effort at a half-iced caramel cake. C'est la vie! The trenches are a mellow (see Webster for definition) mass, nowhere shallower than knee deep, ranging from that to your hips. Honest to

God, that's right. If it was thin, consommey-like stuff, one would not care, but it is about the consistency of good, long-boiled porridge, and if memory serves me aright, Le Page—he of glue fame—was a Frenchman, but he surely overlooked a bet when he didn't patent this muck. I was wading through it hip deep this evening—or rather last—and was absolutely mired. I could move neither way and the N. C. O. with me was in the same fix. Just as we wrenched and tugged we heard the peculiar "swish—swish—swish" which one of Fritz's rifle grenades makes, and I must admit rather timorously awaited the outcome. She fell pretty close, going well into the mixture and splashing my left optic with a juicy cupful as she detonated. I had laughingly remarked to the Corporal that we needed a derrick to get out and that was the instrument—I mean the grenade. The mud wasn't nearly as bad as I thought, and I sloshed along as fast—well, if there had

been a rabbit around I'd have said, "Get out of the way and let some one run who can," for Fritz has no sentiment, and his projectiles no discrimination.

Albeit after dragging through a stretch of this stuff every half hour for a period of time, that always seems interminable, I decided to venture overland, taking a chance on machine guns, etc. Well, I did, and evidently failed to observe the best lessons as laid down in "Infantry Training," for a machine gun opened fire, whistling very close, so I deduced I was on the sky line. I may add by this time I was even wetter and muddier than I had been for the four previous days, also chilled to the marrow. Of course, I flopped into a shell hole comfortably filled with an admixture resembling the Scotch broth one pays for on the C. P. R. diner, while a few yards distant the bullets went Phut-Phut. Just then I heard the "swish—swish" anthem again, and I really believe I breathed a prayer

that a chunk of the grenade would hit me below the water line—I mean legs, so that I could holler for help and have some stretcher "bears" pry me out. Needless to say, they didn't, so I'm still left here in misery. By taking deep soundings and heaving the anchor, I was able to navigate to Company Headquarters.

I am sitting here now in a nice, deep hole, awaiting "Stand to," so thought I'd employ my time in writing you. By the way, I wish occasionally you would send the little girlie a copy of my letters—I don't write her just the same kind of stuff, you understand that, and it is rather a bore writing the same thing twice—also I wish you would send me an indelible pencil, say, once a month—they are very difficult to get here, or even in England.

As I told you, we have pretty deep dug-outs, and one can feel as well as hear the rumble of big guns from the distance—a long intermittent rumble, which I can best

describe as being in a basement of one of those $10 down and $10 monthly frame houses, while the wife moves the piano in fall house-cleaning time. Anyway, I'm thankful it is fairly quiet here.

Yes, Casey got it, so I saw. He also won in addition to his wooden cross, a military one and his commission. The last night I saw him was the night his regiment relieved us just before the June show, and he was talking to Billy G., who, by the way, you know is home now. Casey surely was a good soldier, and you might convey to his wife my condolences.

Our own Colonel, too, was killed—we were all sorry, for he was a ripping good Commanding Officer.

Will be going out some time soon for one of these alleged rests, and will luxuriate in a bath and some clean underwear—this last will be grand, as I fear me I've managed to hatch out an extra large setting of wee beasties—in fact, I feel certain that no

one else can have any—I must have them all. This is only the second time, so I can't really complain. Between them and the mud, I'm more convinced than ever that as a winter resort, France is a distinct failure. I had a letter from Aunt B. to-day, for my birthday—it contained a V, and I am writing to thank her for it when we get out. It's very thoughtful, but I don't really need money—cakes are always jake. Well, my dear, I've run up a terrible screed and the candle runs down—in any event, it's time to waken two wet and snoring "Subs" who will drowsily proceed, rum jar in hand, to the matitunal devotions of the army "Stand to." I'll say good morning, my dear—heaps of love. BILLY.

Somewhere in France.

My Dear Mother,—

It is indeed curious how one forgets where familiar lines originated—I say this

because I've been racking my brain in an endeavour to remember from whence comes the phrase, "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." I'm not sure whether it is the Bible, Shakespeare or Robert W. Chambers, but I don't suppose it makes any tremendous difference.

Howbeit, the phrase is particularly impressive just at the moment, for I've recently —in fact, ten minutes ago, marched back with the Company from that indescribable pleasure, a bath.

I don't suppose that prior to this experience in the war zone I ever properly understood or appreciated the meaning of a bath. I cannot remember, but I fully expect as a youngster I had the youthful aversion to having my ears scrubbed or my hands washed. That aversion to H_2O when I look at it now seems impossible, for I can assure you that a tin tub half filled with hot water is one of the most precious luxuries I can think of out here. In the

ordinary course of one's existence a bath ranks with beds and meals and light and heat, so that one grows accustomed to it—takes it for granted—but when one cogitates on the fact that you manage a bath, say, once every two weeks, it assumes a different aspect. It is something you look forward to, and back at, and is as important as a Sunday School picnic to a boy of ten.

You will readily understand that after, say, twelve days of filth and slush, of fecundence and slime, when your clothes are coated with a sticky veneer, which percolates through in spots, and that before meals you use a knife to scrape the ooze from between your fingers, a bath is somewhat of a glorified affair.

You march a company of men to a Divisional Bath, none too clean, none too sweet smelling. They enter a few at a time—thrown is dirty underwear, sox, etc., and each man given a towel. They pass through, coming out fresh and clean, with the aroma

of carbolic soap filling the immediate atmosphere. That's the outward change, the visible difference, but beneath the mud-stained khaki there are different men. They look the same, except perhaps the face is shinier than before, but the whole physical being has been changed—recharged, as it were. It is quite a privilege, in a sense, for an officer to stand as I stood to-day in an old convent and watch eighty-odd men re-made, temporarily, at least.

Outside it was cold, windy, drear; inside, steamy, smelly, warm. On the wall of the large room, which had been fitted up with pipes and showers, there hung a life-size crucifix, with the figure of The Christ thereon. Above the head was the familiar J. N. R. J. that adorns them all—large or small. From a dozen different vents in the piping rained down the water, from which rose clouds of steam, now and again making the figure on the wall indistinct.

On the stone flagging, hopped and

jumped a section or two of the British army, washing away the accumulation of a fortnight's mud and perspiration. They lathered their bodies and hair, ducked under the streaming showers, with screwed-up faces, paddled ankle deep in soapy water, slapped one another in sheer delight, laughed, shouted or cursed as they played about with dripping heads and shiny bodies, all totally oblivious to the fact that once the room was a sacred spot.

Outside they came with new disinfected clothing, every one puffing a cigarette—a cigarette that was in queer contrast to the shiny faces, which resembled the colour of polished oak. The Sergeant Major called "Fall in," and off we marched along the road with swinging step—the air permeated, as I say, with a strong antiseptic smell —and so to billets.

But that hour has made different beings. In place of sticky, vermin-ridden underclothing, now they wear clean, sweet gar-

ments. The skin tingles with a pleasurable sensation, the slight irritable itchiness disappears—one feels refreshed, revivified, in fact, ready for anything.

I don't know whose brain is responsible for the first baths in France, but if ever any one deserved a 'lasting memorial, it is that person. Should any one wish to subscribe anything to a "Tubs for Tommies" Fund, I can assure you it is a worthy cause.

I don't know whether I've pictured for you a bath day or not, but the picture I call up is lithe, steaming bodies in unstudied attitudes, gaunt, nude forms, with rippling muscles and unrestrained movements, bronzed faces and arms in free, unstudied gestures, while from out the white haze the Crucifix, symbolical of all that our era is founded on, looked down. So you'll see why I prefaced this with "Cleanliness is next to Godliness."

Love to all, and write soon.

BILLY.

Somewhere.

My Dear Mother,—

I just received a letter from you evidently intended for Aunt Bella—however, as it gives me a lot of news, I can't complain.

I really haven't much news to tell you. Still plugging away in the muck. I was "out" after what seemed an interminable time for a day in order to get a bath and some clean underwear, as well as rid myself of a small-sized army of wee beasties who enjoyed themselves alternately in feeding and racing, varied by a battalion at a time digging themselves in. These, together with what we now consider the premier element, mud, cause us most of our troubles.

When I was out I managed to get hold of a few Xmas cards in a Y. M. C. A. hut, and have sent them to every one I could remember. I'm glad to learn that Lady M. liked the letters.

I am enclosing a cheque for two guineas, and I want you to get something for your-

self for Christmas, also for Aunt B. I don't know what to do about the little girl, but will figure something out. There's no one else I care to remember tangibly or yet can afford to. However, get something useful —no junk—and something for the Fergies. God bless 'em! You'll understand that any real present is out of the question, for the only things one procures in ruined French villages are Bière or du Pain or Ruins, and I'm sure none of those are much use as reminders of Christmas.

3 a.m.

Mud to the hips while above wet as only the rain of this land can wet. The reason? Primarily, because I've just come in from a funeral. And what a funeral! To-night, or rather this morning, we laid away all that was mortal of Mac, the Tightwad. I suppose that sounds irreverent to you, but that's the only sobriquet we knew him by, Tightwad. Of him I'll tell you some time again.

Now, I just want to put into a pencil pastel for you, a front-line funeral.

No pageantry, no pomp, no sonorous drum, no solemn note of Chopin's Marche Funèbre, but many a sound, the impression of which will linger, replaced the brass or drum, and I feel sure that by the yawning grave we bared our heads with as much piety and reverence as we would, had it been in vaulted nave or still, stained-glass chapel.

Of course, here, life is cheap, and we joke of death. It was only last night I remarked to the fellows in the Company mess how shocked people at home would be could they but hear us, jocularly speak of death. Albeit that state does exist and one grows callous. Perforce, one must, and it's only when we stand by and see a comrade, with all the word means, laid in a shallow hole, that the solemnity of the thing we hold so cheaply is borne home.

So, to-night we laid away, amid a small

forest of white-washed crosses, the body of Mac, a hero I'll write of, a comrade hard as steel, a friend indeed. Above, the grey, blue dome of God's grand Cathedral, illumined at rare intervals by another Planet of the Universe. Around, every sight or sound that is common to the front—flares, magnesium white, punctuating momentarily the distance, the swift sniffle and boom of 18-pounders, the long sigh and burst of howitzers, and faintly the staccato roll of machine guns. Here, we stand, sixteen figures, black against the grey.

A little truck on a narrow-gauge railway rattles along, two men lift off something—five or six steps—it (the cold, unanswering clay of Mac) is laid in a four-foot hole, and the Padré, as we bare our heads, recites in the dark, the short, active-service liturgy for the dead.

We know the blanket is grey and red wool, we've seen so many; we know that wrapped in it is Mac, who last night came

into our dugout and said blithely, "Cheero." A few shovelfuls of earth, the blanket is covered, the words cease, a whitewashed cross is stuck into the earth, a paper with name, etc., nailed thereon, to await a pioneer with black paint, and the mourners move away.

They move away, awhile the boughs sigh, the field-guns sniff, the machine-guns rattle; move away toward where the ghastly white flares rise, and falling, shed their rays to where men stand at eagle-eyed attention peering into the night, intent on this great business of war.

I don't know whether the foregoing conveys a picture or not, but somehow this morning, as I sit awaiting the dawn, words fail to come. We try not to let the heart rule the head, but I'm afraid somehow, right now, I miss Tightwad more than ever. Not because his going entails one third more duty for me, not because for a thousand reasons—despite all his human frailties I

loved him, but just—because—somehow, when one has lived and trusted, fought and fed, weighed and found true measure for eighteen months, the going tugs at the heart strings.

I want to tell you later how he died, but not to-night, Mother o' Mine.

I've looked out between the sand bag curtain and the chalk; day is heralded; no "dawn like thunder," as Kipling says, but just dawn, with "Stand to" and the thunder of artillery.

So, good morning,

BILLY.

No. 14 General Hospital,
Boulogne.

My Dear Mother,—

As I cabled you the other day, I'm at the above place. I cabled because it seems the War Office always notify the next of kin and sometimes names get mixed, so that a

"serious" wire is sent—anyway, I didn't want you to be worried, as there's nothing much wrong.

I came down here from a Casualty Clearing Station with P. U. O. That, I expect, looks very formidable, but being translated means "Prexia unknown origin," and is the cognomen that our Medical Officers attach to the disease the soldier calls trench fever. It simply means that one's temperature mounts up to 100 or so, and of course one feels rather rotten with it. I had a pretty bad dose, otherwise I wouldn't have been sent to a Casualty Clearing Station. The morning I left I had a temperature of 103 degrees, and a very fast pulse, so our Medical Officer evacuated me, and after a few days at the C. C. S., when it did not abate, I was shipped here. My temp. has gone down on a diet of milk and soda, and with it my weight, as also my strength; in fact, I'm rather teetery on my pins, but am on

light diet now, which is fish and bread, and "doing as well as can be expected."

As I told you, I came down from a Casualty Clearing Station, and I know you'd like my impressions of a hospital-train. Of course, I was a stretcher case, but once on board I sat up and took notice. You see, my last trip in a hospital-train is nothing more than a blank page in memory's volume—in fact, I don't remember a train at all; therefore, I was anxious to study the system. To begin with, I was given a warm suit of pyjamas and bed sox—climbed aboard a stretcher and was carried into the car. Picture to yourself one of our baggage cars—I mean Canadian baggage cars—snowy white with white hospital cots, minus legs, in tiers of three high along each side; bright scarlet curtains on the long windows, a smell of disinfectants permeating the atmosphere, and I think you will have as nearly as possible a view of a Red Cross Hospital Car. They reach along one

after the other, closely joined at the ends with a bellows-like affair that one finds on our baggage cars, and, like our coaches, of course, a corridor down the middle. I lay in my berth, and could look down the long aisle, with scarcely a break in it, seeing apparently endless rows of brown army blankets ruled off by the white lines of the cots—these lines punctuated, as it were, here and there by the V corner of a blanket hanging down the side.

One is gently carried to the door, thence to the bunk, where the orderlies assist one between the blankets. We infantry men sometimes rail at the men behind the lines, the army behind the army, as it is called—we feel they have soft jobs, etc., but I'm sure no one could criticise the orderlies at a Casualty Clearing Station or on a Red Cross train after seeing them at work. With infinite care, as gently as if the form on the stretcher were made of Sevres, they lift and handle. Unless by a white swathed

head they cannot tell at a glance whether you are sick or wounded, and if so how serious the wound, so each one receives the same gentle thought and care. Once in your berth, a grey and red garbed nurse comes up smiling—I often wonder if they, the sisters, ever cease to smile or ever grow cross. In my hospital experience NEVER, and here aboard the train they are just the same—quiet, suave, competent, smiling. Nothing is a trouble, nothing they can do to help you a bore—each case is looked after with surprising speed, here a thermometer stuck in the mouth, there a new bandage or dressing put on in case the moving has started a hemorrhage; but each case is spoken to and the casualty card pinned to the pyjamas or tunic examined.

A tiny toot-toot of the engine and, almost imperceptibly, the train pulls out. Once under way, the Medical Officer comes around, inquires as to the welfare, etc., and if anything needs special care, attends to it.

An orderly is always at hand, willing cheerfully to get anything you want, while anon comes the smiling sister with cigarettes. A few minutes later the long narrow aisle is blue with smoke, and although I walked nearly the whole length with a sister I never heard a groan nor a grumble. Some one has called it "The Train of Pain," but apart from the occasional bandage one might never have known that here and there were maimed bodies or tortured limbs. Everything cheery, everything bright as the cross painted on the outside.

French trains move rapidly enough, but intermittently, so that a journey takes a long time by reason of waits at the stations, so 70 miles is an eight-hour journey. Well, lunch time rolls along and I had visions of the usual glass of milk and soda I had subsisted on for some days—I wasn't disappointed, either, but had I been able to eat there was a bully good lunch, soup, beef, potatoes, peas and pudding with tea, for

full-diet patients, and chicken for light diet ones. As I say, I got none, but there it was to prove once more the infinite care and trouble taken of the broken fighter. Gradually, as the afternoon wore on, tea was served, the lights came on, and I marked the surprising gaiety of the car I was in—here a muddy khaki-clad figure limped to the lavatory, with a laugh or a word to each face peeping from the blanket, or a merry bit of repartee, perhaps, but always if there was any pain it was borne like a stoic.

So we finally pulled into a big station, a delay of a minute or two, then one at a time we were lifted into waiting ambulances. As an example of stoicism, the man opposite to me, from whom I never heard a murmur in eight hours, when they lifted him onto the stretcher said, "Easy does it; my left leg is gone." I never knew that beneath those blankets such a state existed, and from him there was never a word to tell. Cogitate on that.

As you come to the queue of waiting ambulances, they ask your name, and from a list already wired down, tell you off to a hospital—no fuss, no to-do, no ostentation, simply service—service paramount. Away you go, and upon arrival at the hospital are whisked into bed in the same methodical manner. Truly the symbol of the Scarlet Cross spells efficiency.

Well, dear, I'm eagerly awaiting my mail, which will, I suppose, eventually reach me, for it is now nearly a month since I had any. I expect you'll get this about New Years, and where I'll be I cannot say. I'll leave here and go to our base in France and after a few days, up the line again. Re the publishers—they are the best judges of the value of the stuff, and if they are not willing to take a chance, don't you spend any money—you see, you are prejudiced, so don't do it under any circumstances. Understand.

Hope you received my Christmas letter

all right, and in good time. Remember me to every one with a Happy New Year, while to your dear self heaps of love and hopes we'll spend the next one together.

BILLY.

No. 14 General Hospital.

My Dear Mother,—

Your letters of Sept. 18, Oct. 25-31, Novr. 7-15 to hand, all in a bunch, and mighty glad I was to get them. I sorted them all out in sequence of dates and read till I came to the one of Novr. 7th—well, I could hardly believe my eyes—I am awfully glad for the excellent news conveyed, and can hardly wait till the volume appears. I am very glad, indeed, that everything has turned out so well, and you don't need to be told that I hope for your sake the royalties pile in. I agree that Marion should take charge of the exchequer, for you might

get reckless in your old age and buy a set of gold teeth, or "sumpin."

As this is all the paper I have I cannot write more to-day, but will later on. I enclose a war note from the village of Bethune —each district issues their own, and they are no use outside that area—it's a memento. Now, my dear, there is practically nothing else to tell—I'm getting all right again, but they have discovered some new thing wrong with me, and have taken a blood test for enteric—nothing serious, but it may keep me from the firing line for some time. Love to all who care, with more than a large lump for yourself.

BILLY.

My Dear Mother,—

I received your letters of Novr. 27th and 28th, and you don't need to be told I was most happy to get them. I first had better answer a lot of your questions—as to the

mail that was lost, why, it would be almost impossible for me to trace it, so we'll have to let those letters, etc., go. I think I mailed them from Manor House, but could not be sure.

As to acknowledging parcels I always do, and quite promptly, too, but as I told you in my last letter I never got the cake from Aunt Elsie. I sent them a Xmas card, and have from time to time dropped them field cards. As to acknowledging others there will be thanks duly rendered—to the I. O. D. E. (this has already gone forward) —I've received a cake from Aunt B., also one parcel of shortbread from M.—she tells me there are five altogether and I've written her a good scolding for doing it. In any event, I can't eat anything like that now, but I can give them to less fortunate chaps. I may say I'm very glad you remembered the little girl about the book—I sent her a small parcel of lace (real) for Christmas that may help to trim some things mention-

able or otherwise. As to money matters, my dear, I don't spend much on myself over here outside eats, but eggs are 7c. each, and if the other fellows want them in the mess you have to chip in—it's really those things that count. Of course, you always pay two prices for anything, and it is only recently I had to pay 13 francs ($2.60) for a pair of lined gloves—there's no use saying "write home for them," for we can only carry 35 lbs. of stuff, and you can't accumulate much surplus on that. The idea is when you need things, get them, pay the price, and don't holler. However, I'm trying to save with the views you advanced ahead of me, and will do my best.

Of course, I'm in a fever of excitement re the issue of that important book—I expect right now the mail is jealously guarding it, but doubtless it will come along in good time. I suppose that no one was ever in a similar position—one generally views the fruits of their labours before they ma-

ture, but I cannot tell a thing about it, so you may imagine just what a predicament I'm in.

I'm getting O. K. again, and expect to be back very shortly. I am just in receipt of a magazine from you, at least in your writing, with a story by F. J. D.—thanks—also a box of candy from the G.'s, for which I'll write. As I told you in my last letter, I would write as to how poor old Mac was killed. I will just start in my own way.

I crowded between him and the usual pile of baggage just at the entrance to the Cecil Hotel—that was the first time I saw him, and it was before I had come over to this land of strife. I remarked him, for he was arguing with a taxi driver—that attracted my attention, for no officer argues with a taxi driver, firstly because it's futile, secondly, no matter how much you'd like to hit him, you may not, and, lastly, you are certain to invoke a series of caustic remarks; for the taxi driver possesses just

as virulent a vocabulary as did his notorious predecessor, the London cabby. Therefore, I marked Mac, and when later in the rotunda I met him with a bunch of chaps he was discoursing upon the price charged by the cabby.

The next time I met him was a rainy afternoon when we were in billets last spring, as he marched in at the head of a draft. I went out to see him and with usual Canadian spirit said, "Welcome to our City!" I brought him into the Company mess, introduced him around and proffered a drink—he took it. I might say that when a new junior officer first comes it is customary for him to remain rather silent the first night in the presence of the veterans—as it were, sort of "Little children should be," etc., effect. He should answer all questions as to what shows are on in London, and how the heroes of Shorncliffe are putting up with the vicissitudes of week-end leave and things of a kindred nature.

But Mac was different—he regaled us with a sad tale of how much it had cost him at the base mess, where he had stayed two days, and of the horrible price he had paid for meals en route, and so on ad nauseam—in fact, if one did not know all were treated alike, the impression would have been that he had been most unmercifully swindled. I remember slipping out with Jack Y., and he remarked, "He's a rare bird—his name is Mc,—eh?—I'll bet he is a Glasgow Jew." Well, from his penurious proclivities, he earned the name of "Tightwad"—no matter what he bought, he railed against the price, and I recollect well his rage when one morning with usual nonchalance a Flemish pirate charged him 2½d. for a *Mirror,* a ½d. paper.

It made no difference if the rest of the mess ordered a few extras, such as fruit, sardines, or Quaker Oats, he always objected to the cost, until one and all came to believe that a few francs were the be all

and end all of his thought. He didn't make a very pleasant impression, for although he was a good officer, always willing for his turn, he never grumbled about anything except money. This was totally foreign to us, for somehow money doesn't seem to count much over here. One acquires a Croesus-like disregard for francs that really appals one when you send over your bank book—albeit, it is in the air, I think. You adopt the attitude of, "Oh, to-morrow I may be dead; What ho, Warder, Let fall the portcullis, and bring forth the minstrels, let us be merry for once." Anyway, money seems to go fairly rapidly for nothing at all, and while I know to your frugal mind a $ is 100 cents, and this sounds awful, still we are all alike—therefore, we failed to understand Mac's attitude.

The usual routine went on. I saw, ate and slept with Mac till I "took" mine, and, of course, lost track of him until I returned to the Battalion. The first night I came

back I was guided to the Company dugout and almost before greetings were over Mac held up a pair of breeches he had just received from the Quarter Master. They were a pair of issue ones, but infantry officers have to buy them—they are good, strong material, and certainly while they haven't the cut nor appearance of a Bond St. pair, suit admirably for "front line." "Imagine," he said, "9s. 6d. for a pair of breeches like that—I call it a swindle, and I think ordnance should be straafed for charging us at all for them." I reminded him that a grateful country gave one enough outfit allowance, at which he launched into a virulent attack on the Pay Department and the Government who expected one to be always well dressed on an allowance expended months before in clothes, etc., long discarded. I laughed while remarking he was just the same as ever.

I've simply told you all this so that you

would understand something of Mac's character—always and ever, he harped upon money, which, as I say, we never discuss, except to say, "My God, where does it go to?"

However, what I promised to tell you in my last letter was how he died, so I guess I'll start. I think I've written of the state of our trenches, and tried to tell you just how we are situated. Well, the other night while on patrol two of our men were bombed, had some machine-gun fire turned on them. Mac was on duty, and from a sap saw them fall. He turned to the N. C. O. with him and telling him he was going out to see if they were hit, over he went. I didn't see it, being at Company Headquarters, but know how he must have threaded his way through our wire, then dodged around craters, etc., till he found them. It seems both were hit and he helped one in, telling the other he would send back. Meanwhile, one of the men in the post

brought us word and the Officer Commanding went out. While Mac was working his way back with the man, the moon came out and the Hun opened up on him—he arrived safely, although the machine-gun fire kept up, and wanted to go back for the other chap. The O. C. counselled against it, arguing that he was all right for a while, and pointed out that a large cloud was coming over, but Tightwad never hesitated—over and out he went, hugging the ground, dodging from crater to crater in the midst of a true rain of swishy bullets. He arrived at the shell hole where the chap was, but when he stood up to lift him to his back one drilled him through the head—and there we found him two hours later when we went out. We got the other fellow, all right, and brought back Mac's body. I wrote you *how,* but thought perhaps you'd care to know *why,* we buried him. I couldn't help but think of him always careful of the pennies, ever grumbling at the

cost of things material, and how he valued so little his own life, and with the thought came those lines from Macbeth about throwing "away the dearest thing he owned as tho' 'twere a careless trifle."

There's not much more to say, my dear, so I'll close. Love to all, with heaps for yourself.

BILLY.

No. 14 Hospital, Boulogne.

Dear Mother,—

I cannot just remember when I cried before—somehow it is in a man's code that with adolescence he puts tears away, and I can assure you it is doubly so in this game of death. But I cried to-day.

I was walking along the corridor when a chap in the T. M.'s of our brigade spoke to me. After greetings he said, "You'd know Garnet, of the —th Battalion? Well, he's in here with an arm off, and what is

worse, blind, although he doesn't know it." He passed on and all morning I thought of the chap in the surgical ward below, until this afternoon I was impelled to go down. The nurse showed me to the room, and just prior to opening the door said, "He's not very well to-day; he realises for the first time that he is going to be blind; perhaps you'll cheer him up a bit, but don't stay long." A form on the bed, the outline showing white against the pillow—hair, a strip of white bandage, and unshaved cheeks were what I saw. The sister said, "Here's some one to see you," and withdrew. "Hello, old man," I said, cheerily. "How are they coming?" "Oh, yes," came the reply, "you're a Canadian." In that one sentence I think I heard as many human emotions embodied as I ever hope to. Fear and nervousness (akin, but different), anguish and joy—an anomaly, you'll say, but true. I told him my name and battalion—he remembered me, he said, and though

usually talkative, I rather stuck for words—I was taking things in. I noticed his hand nervously clutching the counterpane, and made a desperate stab. Tactlessly, I said, "Well, these aren't such rotten trenches, eh?" "No, no, no!" he said, hurriedly. "But you don't understand. I've never seen them, and what's more, I'm never—going to!" Then quickly, "I'm blind, do you understand—blind? I didn't know till last night, when I realised it for the first time."

He was distraught and working himself into a nervous state, so I pulled myself together, and in a modulated voice tried to reassure him. I told him about the wonderful advances of surgery in this war, how they could do anything, and then and there told the best lie I've ever done. From whole cloth I wove a tale about a friend of mine who was wounded and thought he was going to lose his sight, but how it came back after a while. I explained that the famous saline cure was almost miraculous

and I "ad libed" for what seemed ages, but all to no purpose. "But, think," he said, "never again to see light—never to know if it's day, never to read, to skate, to see a show—to hear people cheering somewhere and not know what it's about." He was plainly growing hysterical, and the first thought I had was getting up to go out. I saw this was out of the question, so instead took the spasmodic, moving hand in mine, while rambling on in my best reassuring way. He talked on and on, his sentences all reiterating the same ideas, "being led around like a dog," "no difference between night and day"—"I wish I'd known, I'd have blown out my brains"—until I was rapidly growing fearful for him.

Just as he began to quiet down in came sister, telling me "I'd stayed long enough." But he said, "No, sister, he's a Canadian; let him stay." He pleaded till she did. I don't know anything and care less about this segregation business they are arguing, but

the crux of the matter was summed up in that sentence. We started again—I spoke of the Peace talk, of the weather—I asked him innumerable questions, which if answered at all were a perfunctory "far niente" "yes" or "no"—but he kept saying over and over again, "Christ, Christ"—not as a curse, not with an atom of blasphemy, but more as one prays. I think that started my tears; anyway, they came, and I could not stop them—I blew my nose, I sniffled, I coughed, then finally stopped. Some one has said that the test of a man's bravery is heavy shell fire. I don't know, but I'll go through a heavy shelling or dodge minnies all day in preference to another hour of mental torture like I had to-day. I never realised how a man could suffer before. I racked my brain for cheerful topics, and delved into my memory for funny stories, but his grief was too deep, for it seemed useless. Just when I reached the end of my tether in came a chaplain—I was thankful

for any one to relieve the strain. But it all started again; he poured out the pent-up feelings to the Padré, who in his sweet way did his best to assuage the mental pain. He talked in a soft, convincing way, also Garnet babbled on. I had Garnet's hand, and I don't know when he stopped talking, but I felt, rather than heard, the Padré's voice alone. The words seemed to sink into my mind subconsciously—I heard him say, "Yes, the Christ you name can make you see. Remember the beggar by the roadside. He can wipe away all the tears from your eyes." Garnet was quiet and listened. The Padré talked on—he never suggested that the blindness would be incurable—he spoke of the far away worse things that might have happened. "Why, you have your memory —think, my boy, if God had taken that!" "But it wasn't God," broke in Garnet. "Think, my boy," he went on, "if God had taken that away—you might see, but could not enjoy; you could read, it is true, but not

understand. Think of that living death, to see things, but not appreciate them, while you have all the memories of years to look back on, and the probable hope that what you think is wrong." He spoke of the many men who would have to endure this trouble, of the great men who had been blind—he told him of Sir Arthur Pearson, who is doing so much for the blind, and how he had known for years he was slowly losing his sight, and finally of Milton. He drifted into that famous sonnet:

"When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide;
And that one talent, which is death to hide,
Lodged with me useless, tho' my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker,"

and so on till the end, "They also serve who only stand and wait." It was like a benediction, but after a moment he looked across at me and rose only to kneel. Seeing he was

going to pray, I did likewise. There in that room he offered up as fine a prayer as I ever heard—what he said, I don't know, but I felt it, and he ended up with, "And make His light to shine upon you."

I guess we forget God out here, although sometimes He is very near, but I said "Amen" just as fervently as I used to when on your shoulder I said it after "Now I lay me," and also said, "God bless the Padré," which is the first time I ever remember saying it just the same way. We rose. Garnet said, "Thank you, Sir," and felt for the Padré's hand. Out we went—I was crying again.

I haven't received any more mail, and I don't expect any now to-day, although I've waited for the book you said you were sending. I expect it, together with the rest of my mail, is somewhere up the line, and in the Christmas rush it may be late. However, I guess it will come along O. K. I am not looking forward to a very cheer-

ful Christmas. Of course, I suppose it is better than the front line, but there I'd know every one, anyway. I'm writing to Aunt Bella to-night. The weather here is very cold, and for twenty-four hours there has been a big storm on, rain with a high wind, and I'm told several wrecks in the Channel. As to my ailments, I have no fever, but they have me diagnosed as gastritis—I have bad pains when and after I eat, with dysentery slightly, in addition to quite a lot of pain near my appendix. They want to send me to England after I'm better, but I asked them not to—if I go I'm struck off the strength, and good-bye to any promotion, remote as it seems to be. Of course, one has no say in the matter, being in the army.

There's no more news, but I can send heaps of love to yourself, with plenty of New Year's greetings for any one else.

BILLY.

50 Weymouth St.,
London, W., Eng.

Dear Mother,—

As I wired you, I'm in London. There's not much to tell, except that they figured I had developed appendicitis symptoms, and shipped me over on the 30th, I have been examined, and am only waiting till they decide exactly whether to operate or blast. I'm feeling fairly fit, although not by any means up to form—I have no appetite, and suffer with bad pains after food—that's the worst.

Well, my mail, of course, is all bunged up again. I received a parcel from Mrs. S. just before I left Boulogne, and will write them. As yet I've not received the book, but expect it will come in time.

This is one of the best hospitals, so they say, in London—a private one, with civilian Doctors, all Harley St. specialists, and there are other patients beside officers, I mean private patients. It is used exclusively for

Canadian officers, that is, a part of it, and is not rationed, etc., by the army. While I cannot eat much the food seems to be quite good, with a big variety, more so than in an army hospital. How long I'll be here I cannot say, but I'm pretty certain if they operate to get three months' leave, and if I do, I'll go back to Canada. However, I'll cable you before I do anything, and you reply to this address—just what you think best. I'm eagerly awaiting a letter from you, telling me all about things. Nearly everything going to Canada, also coming, is censored, so I want you to be very careful what you say, for military reasons. I can't think of anything else to tell you—will write often, although now it costs a penny.

Love to all, with heaps for you.

BILLY.

50 Weymouth St., London.

My Dear Mother,—

Your letters of Dec. 11th and 16th just to hand. I'm more than amazed that you didn't know I was in hospital. I cabled you from Boulogne on either the 4th or 5th of December, but I guess some way or other the thieves we have to contend with at various junctures pocketed the money.

Well, my dear, I have not as yet received a copy of the book, but trust the same will come to hand. In any event, on receipt of this, I wish you would mail me another copy—I would like to send one to Lady M. I am feeling better somewhat, but am still under observation, and may have to be operated on for appendicitis, although they are loath to do so unless necessary.

I've received no parcels from any one that I haven't told you of—that is, none from Auntie and only two out of five from the little girl. However, I expect they'll turn up in due course. Yes, the little girl

is good looking, and I figure will make me a good wife to pull in harness with over the road, whether it be rocky or rosy. As I said, she is good looking, which, while not a necessity, cannot be classed as a luxury. She is a church-goer and interested in those things which should suit you.

I haven't any more to say that's interesting. The weather here is very cold for England, with sleet and snow. I've seen one or two rather good shows—one this afternoon, an adaptation of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves—the most wonderful riots of colour imaginable, with excellent music.

Address me, as I said, simply c/o Canadian Record's Office, London. Love to every one, with sincere hopes that you are better ere this.

BILLY.

50 Weymouth St., London.

Dear Mother,—

Just a few lines in bed, the fifth day after an operation for appendicitis. I'm feeling fairly fit, and have not much pain now—had rather a rough time till last night, as I developed a cough, due to chloroform, which caused a lot of pain and kept my temp. up.

"The Sunny Sub" came to hand—it is very nicely gotten up, but I think too personal. As it says in the foreword, they were never intended but for a mother's eye, and if I had been editing it would have pruned a little here and there. This is all I will say—I'm pleased otherwise.

Must stop—feel my temp. soaring—will write soon again.

BILLY.

50 Weymouth St.. London.

My Dear Mother,—

I cannot for the life of me believe that you've stopped writing me, but since Christmas have only had one letter, that written on Dec. 19th, I think, although you are, I presume, sending my mail c/o Records Office as I cabled. I am constantly saying to myself that if no one else wrote I would still believe that my own dear Maw did—however, I suppose I will just have to be patient a while in the hopes that some will come. I've lain here now for two weeks eagerly every morning anticipating some letters, but always disappointed.

I'm coming along fine—the stitches were taken out a few days ago and I expect to be able to sit up on a chair in a day or two. I'm in no pain now, but of course have to be careful for some time in case the wound should bleed internally. I feel very fit, however, and have a big appetite—in fact, enjoy my meals, which is something I've

not done for many months, so I expect soon to be about. I was horribly run down, however, before the operation—in fact, weigh only about 140 pounds—less than I've done for ten years, and am so thin now my legs are like pipe stems and my arms bigger around the elbow joint than anywhere else. Just what leave I'll get I can't say, but not likely enough to get to Canada on. They are giving very short leaves now, as every officer is required for the front. I have received no parcels since I wrote you last and fear Aunt B.'s has gone astray—I believe she said there was a gold piece in it too, which makes it worse than ever. I'll write her, anyway.

All the staff here have enjoyed the book immensely and a V.A.D. whom I lent it to said her husband sat up till 1 a.m. to finish it, something he never did to her knowledge before, so I guess it's all right. The weather here is very cold, skating general, and in fact the coldest Jany. for 30 years. Of

course, I haven't been out, so cannot say from experience.

I can't think of any more news—hope you are better and able to get around. Love to any one who cares, with a generous heap for your dear self,

BILLY.

Stoke Court,
Stoke Poges, Bucks.

My Dear Mother,—

Your letters of Decr. 24th, Jany. 3-7-14-21 all to hand in a flock and you can bet I was awfully glad to get them. I see the envelopes are addressed c/o Record Office —I remember writing you once that if I were wounded to address them c/o Canadian Records Office—the mere fact that they did not have Canadian on balled things up a bit—in fact, they were lurking around some place else altogether. However, there is some satisfaction in getting them even

that late. By the way, a parcel with a cake and some hankies came to hand, also two more from the little girlie, one from Aunt B. and one from Mrs. J.—all acknowledged. Received all the comments, &c., also the clipping from the *Globe*. I did not receive the parcel of sox, but suppose they will arrive in due course, when I will forward them to the Officer Commanding A Co. for the men.

It is very hard here to get a chance to write—there is only room among one hundred that you can sit in, for they only keep one fire going and the rest of the house is like an ice plant. In this room, larger than the average workingman's whole house, there is always a noise—bridge games, piano, canned music or "sumpin"—so that unless I retire to my bedroom, which is so chillsome one has perforce to wear a great coat, there is no chance to write a line.

I think I told you that this house was where Gray, the poet, once lived, and that

the church where he wrote "The Elegy" is close by. I spent the other morning in the church yard and the church itself. It is a queer old spot indeed, dating back to 1100 odd, with many rare stained glass windows, which were put in in the 1200's. The pew which this family has was the one which Gray occupied—I sat in it—"Gray's corner," as it is called, but it really didn't inspire me to any wonderful strophes—in fact, left me rather cold. I thought perhaps I might have an inspiration, but, alas, no. However, I rambled, if that is the correct word, among the "mouldering heaps," reading half obliterated epitaphs on moss covered stones, also climbed the "ivy mantled tower," although the owl has, I believe, long since gone to its rest. Vandal that I am, I chiselled a small fragment of stone from the tower and also plucked a few sprigs of ivy, which I enclose herewith.

You might convey my sincerest thanks to Miss C. and assure her that I appreciate

her kindness. Tell her that when I come back I'll endeavour to put my thanks in a more tangible form, say a ride around the belt line or luncheon at Bowles'.

I wish you would collect some interesting clippings, &c., and send them in a letter —there's no use sending the whole paper, as they never arrive, if you want them. I will look up Mr. O. when I go up to London this week, or rather next, to have a new bandage put on the wound—a sort of binder for support—and if I get time will see him.

Love to all.

BILLY.

Pax Hill Park,
Lindfield, Sussex.

My Dear Mother,—

As you will see, I have changed my address—was not at all happy where I was, and yesterday came here till the finish of

my leave. I rang up Mr. O. yesterday and went to lunch with him—he was most charming and we rambled for an hour in the very old part of London, seeing quaint spots, etc. I was not feeling awfully well, therefore did not enjoy it as much as I might have. My nerves are on the jump again and my sleeping apparatus has disappeared almost completely. In fact, my dear, I'm far from well—just what is going to happen after March 20th I can't say, but I can assure you I'm not in any fit shape to go to France. However, only time can tell. I received the sox from Galt and will write a letter of thanks—not to-day, because I'm not able to compose one fitting. I've forwarded the sox on to one of the boys in the Battalion and they will be appreciated, I assure you.

I've had no mail from you since the large bunch of letters I got, but presume some will come along. Lots of Canadian mail went down on the *Laconia,* so we're told.

I do wish you would send registered two copies of that book—I tried to get one from Mr. O., but he did not have any. Now, my dear, I have no more news—will write you later in the week when I feel better.

Love, BILLY.

In the Camp.

My Dear Mother,—

I'm wondering if you'll remember those lines in "Romeo and Juliet" about "the winged messenger of Heaven" and the "white upturned wondering eyes of mortals that gaze on him when he bestrides the lazy pacing clouds and sails upon the bosom of the air."

At all events, they come to me now as I watched easily the most thrilling air fight I've seen since I've been out. I fully expect there were hundreds of white upturned eyes watching it as well. It seems particularly appropriate, for the "lazy pacing

clouds" were there, fleecy, almost glinting, in a sky cold and clear.

Ordinarily one gives a cursory, apathetic glance after the first odd dozen fights in the air, then rather boredly goes about his business—but some way as I craned my neck into the sky this morning the interest grew. I don't know whether I've ever sketched for you my impressions of an air fight, but I'll tell you about this one.

I came out of our "elephant" at the boom, boom, boom of the quick firing anti-aircraft guns just to see if anything might happen. I'm one of those unfortunate ones in France who must plead Not Guilty to ever having seen Fritz's machine brought down by Archie's, although I always look when I hear them. As I say, I looked up, and there, as usual, was the dappled sky where the shells were breaking. Dappled is as descriptive a word as I can apply, for the section of sky looks like a dappled grey horse, if the horse were blue. It sounds

funny, perhaps, to put it that way, but it conveys my meaning, I hope. It's this series of small white and black rings of smoke left by the exploding shells that nearly always first calls one's attention to the fact that a Hun plane is in the offing—then to find the plane. If I were giving instructions to tourists I would emphasise the fact that if they really wanted to see the plane to look anywhere but close to the rings. So you gaze, trying to "pick up" the machine. Often you can hear the purr of it, but you'll search for maybe minutes until there's a glint, a shimmer, like a lone sunbeam in the late afternoon—then you've spotted it. White, almost invisible to the eye, it wheels and dips. If you want to follow it you dare not look away for any length of time lest you lose it. This is the German machine I speak of—ours are painted differently so we can usually find them more quickly.

Well, that is just what occurred—I hunted in the blue till I saw the German

plane, then ours. We employ slow-going machines for observation and bombing work and faster ones for fighting. One learns to distinguish the difference in them quite readily when they are in the air, but if you took me back to an aerodrome I expect they would all look alike to me. This machine of ours was one of our slower ones—they are not primarily intended for fighting. I expect likely they were taking photos, for it is a lovely day. Evidently our friend the Hun appeared out somewhere and proceeded to give battle. Our Archies, of course, picked him up until he got close to the other machine, when they stopped for fear of hitting it.

Then, as I say, I watched one of the prettiest fights I have ever seen—our plane manœuvring and trying to climb, while the fast Hun fighter crept nearer and nearer—watched them dip and turn, each trying to jockey for position. Then one hears a ripping purr or two from above. It's hard to

describe that sound, but imagine stepping on the accelerator of a purring cat—it's the machine guns crackling up there. Almost indistinct little threads of black or white suddenly appear like a series of irregular ravels in a silk stocking. These are made by "tracer" bullets, which are used to show just where the guns are firing, one in every so many rounds—they leave this trail behind them, thus enabling the airmen to correct the aim. For I suppose five minutes they twisted, dived, climbed and slipped. All of us wondered what the outcome would be, when suddenly Fritz turned and started back towards whence he came. We knew the reason, but we couldn't see it for a moment—it appeared in a second like a wasp—one of our fast fighting machines leaving behind a thin trail of smoke. On he came after the flying machine (flying being used to denote fleeing) until it was useless and dangerous to go further. That's all of it. I'd like to have told you that the

German plane was shot down, and if I were writing a story, might have—but—"he lived to fight another day."

As I said, however, it was a topping fight, and not always does the enemy come off so luckily—in fact, only a few days ago one of their machines crashed down near our billets. The pilot was dead, but the observer, a youngster of seventeen, was uninjured, and when our men ran to the wreck blazed away with a revolver at them—he was a plucky little kid, and the Brigade Intelligence Officer told me no amount of interrogation got much information from him. He wouldn't believe the Channel was open and even when confronted with the previous day's London papers insisted they were published in Paris or somewhere. Odd, isn't it, that those Huns are so ignorant?—I'm glad I'm British.

Well, my dear, not much news—same old grind. Remember me to all and write soon —heaps of love. BILLY.

In the Field.

My Dear Mother,—

Our pleasures out here are not always what can be called Rabelaisian, to say the least, but sometimes they seem very wonderful indeed, by comparison. For instance, I don't suppose that a meal consisting of roast beef, rather tough, half boiled, half roasted, with some bread three days old, butter that has been interned for a good term in a tin, and was in all probability none too fresh when it was poured in, together with some potatoes and French peas, is a meal to make the average mouth water, but when it is added to by a soupçon of champagne at 6 francs the bottle and tamped down by a rice pudding with a sauce concocted by a versatile batman from condensed milk, Australian jam, and le Bon Dieu knows what else, it certainly seems a garguntian feast—particularly after six days when you've munched a chunk of bully

or spooned out a plate of cold Maconochie. That's one pleasure—a meal.

Of course we have others. MAIL DAY, when the Canadian mail comes in, is one. In fact that's the great day—the gala day of the week—for then we commune with those "Over There," and feast like lords on date cookies, which quite frequently have been closely associated with a moist fruit cake, or been severely kissed by some cocoanut kisses. Anyway they taste good and I am sure convey great pleasure.

So Mail Day ranks as a bright spot, giving a lot of happiness. In addition I have always taken great pleasure in writing to you—somehow when I sit down to inscribe all my thoughts, it is a kind of confessional, and I seem to ramble on at random. It is almost as good as receiving a bright newsy letter to write one. This is oft not a very easy task either, I'd have you know, for usually there's not such a budget of news as would interest, or yet could be told.

You mentioned once that my letters seemed rather sad—well, my dear, I wrote them just as I felt at the time when the mood was on me. As I say, pleasures are not many, and I'm afraid that numbers of the incidents that cause a laugh out here, if transplanted from the chalky soil hereabouts, would wither—it really requires the environment to make them seem funny. And truly, in many cases they are funny, but some of the sayings, I fear me, would not pass the censor, if the letter happened to strike, say, a sanctimoniously inclined person. There's many and many an incident that could never be written about that has caused endless merriment. In fact one that occurred between a Colonel and a full private in the rear rank ever so long ago, has been told and retold in our brigade, never failing to elicit considerable laughter —but I couldn't tell you.

Working parties invariably have a great deal of genuine humour around them. It's

always dark, and the remarks that pass as the party comes up to a communication trench, loaded with corrugated iron "A" frames or barbed wire, certainly have as humorous a flavour as one could wish. Standing out clear in my memory is one night of murky darkness and falling rain when a party of men I had were digging for the Engineers. I would here interpolate that this is one of the principal things an infantry man does—work for the Engineers—who reap the kudos for the same. Heigh ho!—we foot sloggers are the Patsy boys for the army, for a surety. In any event this night was wet and cold—we were perhaps 800 yards behind the front line scratching away. Every few minutes indirect machine gun fire from the Hun played about, so that we had to fall flat. There were innumerable shell holes all filled with water, while the ground was decidedly slippery. One chap in his hurry to dodge a burst of fire slipped and rolled into a nearby hole.

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Wet up to his neck, he rose and, standing in the "Goo," lifted up his voice—"Well may I go to hell—to *think I volunteered* for this."

You may not appreciate this, nor yet the following of McKinnon, one of our Officers who walked three miles to a rubber boot depot, "Because none of these batmen can pick out a decent pair of boots, and I'm going to have a pair that fit me this time," who, when he returned to the dugout and candle light, discovered that he had picked out both for the same foot. You see you have to understand the conditions before you appreciate the joke.

For instance it was only the other night McQuarrie handed us a laugh. Rutherford and myself were sitting at supper—it had been raining at least all day, and everything was dripping. In camp Mac begrimed and shiny, his shrapnel helmet shedding on to his already water soaked shoulders, and his boots squelching at every step.

With the saddest look in the world and most pathetically disgruntled voice, he said, "This is a blankety blank life." Then slithering out of his trench coat, his eye catching sight of a plate of "Pork and" brightened. Quite unconsciously, with all the dignity one would assume in the "Carlton," he called "Waiter" to a muddy batman only two yards away behind a curtain. Again, I say you require the surroundings, but I only tell you these little things that seem funny to us, to show that we don't perpetually wear long faces and it is not all sorrow out here.

I could keep on indefinitely quoting stories which to us are funny, albeit I don't think you would understand, but en passant, will tell you one of the most pathetic tales I wot of.

There came on a draft to our Company a small skinny individual. One felt sorry for him just by looking at him. He had a face as cheerful as the back of a train you

should have caught. In fact, altogether he was as dismal an affair as you could picture. I watched him time after time when the Corporal was sorting out the mail, and who would finally turn to him and say, "Nothing for you." He always seemed to expect something that never arrived.

One day at a pay parade I happened to look over his pay book. His next of kin was a second cousin, married, evidently living on a farm. I questioned him and found he was an orphan. As I say he never got any letters or parcels, and so once or twice on foot inspection I slipped him a pair of those good home knit socks you send me.* Eventually, one day a parcel did arrive for him. He lit up like a cathedral, and whilst some of the others stood round he jerked off the cotton cover and produced, what do you think? Two tins of Clark's pork and beans, two tins of Clark's bully beef, and a small tin of cheese. If there are

*Because issue ones get holey quickly.

three things edible in France which one can gorge upon at the expense of the country they are cheese, bully and beans. In fact, the men usually refuse to take any cheese. That's the explanation.

The crowd laughed and joked, while he just walked over to the nearby incinerator to dump the lot in. It certainly was funny but there was also just a tinge of pathos to it, don't you think?

Looking this scrawl over, there seems to be an awful lot about parcels, which is not a hint for any more, but perhaps unconsciously an appreciation.

Give my kindest regards and fondest remembrances to my dear old friends Mr. and Mrs. T. and with loads of love to your dear self.

BILLY.

In the Field.

My Dear Mother,—

I started this letter an hour ago but was interrupted by the Padre who came in for "a wee bit talk," as he said. As he has just left me, and I've long been minded to write you about him I'll postpone what I started out to say.

Apropos of Padres—the name Chaplains get out here—I would preface my remarks by stating that often when a lad I used to go to church, if the minister wasn't a good *speaker* or there were no pretty girls in the choir, or the organist should have been a blacksmith. I frequently did not take much interest in the minister himself—I went wrongly, I'll admit, but primarily to be entertained or learn something of oratory.

However I've changed my views materially over here since I've seen some of the black shoulder strapped Padres work, and I think I'll always have a greater respect and

consideration for them in the future. I say some of them, for they don't all command the same respect, any more than we combatants do, but the *ilk* has enhanced in value in my eyes considerably by the efforts of one of them—Our Padre.

He's short, gaunt and wiry; his clothes seem to drape on him and his face is the colour of ours—sort of a tanned oak. It's not a pleasant face—it's wrinkled and hard looking—there are crow's feet at the eyes which are grey, I think, and always laughing. There are several seams at various angles on his physiognomy, in short, he is anything but clerical looking, and I'll venture to state if one dressed him up in ordinary clothes, not one in a hundred, nay a thousand, could conjecture correctly what manner of life he followed. I certainly would fail, I'm sure.

But beyond that face, behind the mud stained, draped uniform, I would wager there is no stouter nor kindlier heart. The

expression "a heart as big as a church" I suppose originated a long time since when churches were the largest buildings, but his is in the sky scraper or department store class.

If I sat down to tabulate the innumerable acts, great and small, that have endeared him to the men and added to their comfort, I fear my paper would run short, but I must tell you at least a few. To begin with, when a certain "Big Show" was on and the men had fallen like nine pins, he stayed out three days and nights, always under shell fire, with a couple of men and as he came across a body a small grave was scratched, the personal effects put in a sand bag. A murmured prayer, and then on again, for seventy-two long weary hours, the whole time in the forward area. Whether any unkindly shell has since dug up some of those graves I can't say, but he alone knows just how many bodies he breathed a final prayer above. That alone entitles him to

some decoration, which I don't suppose he will ever get. It wasn't duty made him do it, because he didn't have to, but it was done.

He is a worker as you'll gather, but he's also a fighter. While I wasn't there personally, I was told that once when wandering around some posts, he learned that the men were short of bombs and all wires cut. He never said a word but returned after a time with a pail full of mills, twenty-four in all, which would weigh over thirty-six pounds, while it was only the other night he walked about ten miles in order to get cocoa, sugar and milk so that a working party could have a hot drink when they arrived back to supports in the early hours.

Those sort of things make quite a strong appeal and while I love him so may be prejudiced in his favour, I'll bet if one could take the vote of *every* officer and man it would be unanimously in his favour. As for the men—adoration is scarcely the word,

but it comes as close as any that I can conjure up right now.

He, and his life, just one glorified sermon, which reminds me that his sermons are without precedent. Can you picture a battalion just relieved on a Saturday night wearily trudging in muck to billets and how the thought of Sunday church parade would rankle. Well our men know he'll never deliver a long sermon if they are tired, not that they are ever very long, but once I remember for service, a hymn, the usual ritual for field service, including the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the sermon which was as follows: "It has been said, 'Speech is silver—Silence is golden'—so I give you the best I have to offer—Gold. We will now sing the National Anthem." If you think that wasn't a priceless oration, and did more good than any theological discourse, divided into firstly—secondly—thirdly, why you win two more chances.

He's always mouching around the line

where he "hadn't orter be"—up in the trenches support or front, often popping in to have a meal and if there are any letters to censor (the bane of an officer's day, by the way) he does his share if not more.

Of course they are not *all* like him, nor liked as he is, but as I say, my opinion of Chaplains has expanded considerably as I review the deeds of Our Own Padre.

Likewise this letter has expanded, so good night, Mother o' mine, for now I must pinch an hour's sleep.

Love to all,

BILLY.

Somewhere in France.

Dear Mother,—

I've just come in to the billet after two hours of sitting in an O. P. watching afar the front line, so I felt that I must, if possible, interpret for you the view as it is reflected on my mind. The spell to write

is on me and if I ramble on rather disconnectedly, you'll excuse me I know.

I've been sitting in a "camouflage" tree that is used as an O. P. gazing out across the war-riven lands between a road running parallel to the lines and a dreary ditch known as "The line." If you don't know what a "camouflage" tree is I'm afraid I can't tell you, because I know not how the censor will take it, but there is such a thing. Howbeit I sat there this glorious winter afternoon with a pair of binoculars gazing out to the grey blue veins netting the snow covered land, the veins that betoken the labyrinthine ways of the trenches, and what a scene! I've racked my brain for a fitting word to picture it, and can best express the idea conveyed to me by comparison of the landscape to a tapestry all cut up with woven into it all the sombre colours that one could conjure up, greys, whites, blacks, browns all dun and drab with only here and there a glint of golden shimmer as the

sun loaned his beams to a hump of snow clad land, or the ruins of a one time building.

It's been very quiet all day, in fact as one sat up in that still tree watching, watching across that desolate strip, the moments long lingering with absolute solitude made themselves felt almost. Still and clear the air, scarcely a sound for minutes at a time, so strange, so odd in this land where there is scarce a moment unbroken, undisturbed by the weird blast of H. E., so I sat and marvelled at the view in front. As I say a tangled irregular net of dirty coloured lines between snow white meadows, yet not meadows, for I knew beneath them lay the scarred distorted land that once was beauteous Picardy. The sun gleaming down sheened and sparkled the foreground, making almost a fairyland, while every bough of the wounded trees sentinelling the road was transformed into a glistening fantastic pendant, and oh Dear, what splendour

there seemed in those silences and the thoughts engendered by them. Thoughts of home, of the ones I loved, memories of days so foreign of what I have been living in lately; days of peace, nights of ease all relegated into an abyssmal depth for the great God of War and I pondered mightily as that procession of pictures in memory (pictures that lure and enchanted) passed, pondered as to the why and wherefore this old world should have gone mad. It seems a shame. But there, I don't want to seem pessimistic or discontented, for after all while it is not pleasant, there will always be happy reminiscences of France during the war. However, I sat until the sun sank in a blaze of saffron behind me, and the view changed.

As old Sol journeyed afar beyond the rim, so journeyed the heat he gave out and so the light. Twilight came, the short winter twilight and the infinity of view before me melted. I say infinity, because from

the snow covered ground there was no horizon. The line merged into whitish sky, I know not where slowly blending into greyish blue, while here and there a small wayward cloud was halved in cerise from the west. So, my Dear, I clambered down to come in here filled with a thousand desires and wishes, a thousand thoughts that tingle and quiver in my brain but which I cannot articulate, unexpressed little hopes, inexpressible longings that even to you I don't seem capable of putting on paper. I think I must be homesick to-night, certainly moody to say the least, so guess I'll close.

Love to any who care to be remembered, with the usual overdose to yourself.

BILLY.

Somewhere in France.

Dear Mother,—

Since I last wrote you we have moved up from reserve to the front line once more, and are not having too bad a tour. It is

as usual mucky and wet, but the dugouts are not bad. The one we are in at present is nice and deep, much deeper than our old H. Q. which was minnied in some days ago. This is quite a decent one with a table, 4 boxes, and 2 bunks in to use when you get the odd chance to sleep, at present none too prevalent, as there are only 3 of us to the Co'y and it seems as though you just drop off to sleep when it is time to stagger out again for the next tour. Sherman was right, I'll give my affidavit if you want it. I am supposed to be on duty on the dug-out now to receive any messages that come, so intend to burnish up the time by indicting letters to all the people to whom I owe. Of course I never figure I owe you one, and particularly not lately, as it is some time since I got the last one, however see'in as 'ow you're my maw, figure I'll let you in on the time, I'm chiselling from the Government.

A runner has just reported with a mes-

sage that the gunners are going to put on a shoot in a few minutes, so I have had to stop to send our word to Little Boy Blue, who is on duty in the trench, Jerry is asleep snoring like a pedigreed bull dog. You know him, but I don't think I've ever told you about Bluey, as we call him. Ordinarily he doesn't belong to this Co'y, but as we are short they sent him over for this tour. He is a funny kid, and Blue isn't his name at all, just a nickname because he is the most despondent, morose fellow in the world. Honestly, I have never seen him even moderately jolly. He came while I was in Blighty, so had his name long before I knew him, but he always seemed to me to be such a surly fellow, hardly ever a word more than necessary, and even the morning jolt of rum never caused him to smile. I tried my brand of humour on him numerous times, but invariably it left him cold. His Co'y and ours were billeted together last time out and I

really endeavoured to fathom him without success.

What a life! The signaller has just turned me in a message asking for a return showing the number of Russians in the Co'y who speak Bulgarian. I ask you, can you beat it? In consequence of the above I have had to dig out the C. S. M. whose job at the best of times is a rotten one, and who will now dredge his way through the muck to all the posts to enquire of the noble representatives of the steam roller if they talk Bulgarian. This is the last straw. I have often said that ere I embark ever again to war I shall compile a complete record in a vest pocket edition of every man, including the number of pimple spots and blemishes on his anatomy, also including his preference in drinks, whether he likes blondes or brunettes, history of his disgraceful past, with a horoscope of his terrible future, so as to have it handy in case some red tabbed geek who has noth-

ing more to do than figure out fool questions should want them. Albeit this one is what my fellow Colonials, the Australians, would call the "purple limit."

I am now going out to watch the shoot.

LATER.

This letter was started last night and although it is now another day it really makes no difference when you are in a dug-out for light does not come in and I am writing this by the light of the usual lone candle. Since I stopped writing it has been one night-mare of a night, the everlasting mud, the slithering rain and numbing cold, the general depression attendant with them, all a long, long "stand too," and now I am here being temporarily heated by that elixir, "the rum issue." "I wonder what the venters buy one-half so precious as the stuff they sell."

I have been reading this over and I find although I'd forgotten it I started out to

tell you about Little Boy Blue. It is queer that I did that, harking back I felt odd about him; in any event he's napoo. Right now his body is down at the brigade. I've told you how he was so sadlike and dour. Well, only yesterday afternoon as we sat on the dugout swapping confidences, me to him about my hopes and plans of a home, etc., when I get back. He told me what, I expect, was the reason why he wasn't more cheerful. He told me a lot about his early life. His father, it seems, was never fond of him because he wasn't aggressive enough. He said he was like his mother, of whom he had a picture. His father always nagged at him, much to his mother's disgust, and he told me how when war broke out his father harped at him to join up, although it was against his mother's wish, while he himself evinced no desire to do so, in fact he said, "I'm no soldier at all. I hate this damned business." I guess I'm like him too. Well anyway, finally after as much

jibing as he could stand, he enlisted. He went on as we smoked to tell how different his parents were, mother mild, gentle, the father pugnacious, vindictive. "I'll not forget the night I left before we sailed; the old man said, 'If you don't come home with a V. C. you're no son of mine,' but mother just cried and kissed me." Every letter from his mother told him how worried she was for his safety and of the oft repeated prayer to keep him for her. Well I suppose it got on his nerve, it wasn't wise of her I know, and I am thankful you're not worrying about me, or if you are, not telling me so. Anyway he would feel unhappy about her. I also told him about you and me, in fact we almost reached an understanding, a common ground. Now I guess I've got to write to her. That's going to be hard. One of the hardest things we have to do, particularly if you like the one who went. I never liked him, but Kismet is a strange being to bring us nearer than ever

before, a few hours ago. Then this. So when I finish this I've got to tell her what I can. How after the shoot the Huns started a minnie bombardment, that's when it got him, and do you know that when I helped put him on a stretcher to take him to a trench railway, near by a flare went up, and he was smiling, smiling in death, caused by concussion—not a mark on him, but every nerve centre paralysed instantaneously—smiling in death, as I never saw him smile in life. While the white flare burned bright I looked, and as we started to the head of the rail through the mud, those lines of Eugene Field's came back:

The little toy dog is covered with dust,
And sturdy and staunch he stands,
And the little tin soldier is red with rust,
While his musket moulds in his hands.

Time was when the little toy dog was new
And the soldier passing fair,

For that was the time when Little Boy Blue,
Kissed them and put them there.

So whole I did a double tour last night because he was gone, ever came the thought, as I remembered his story and the mother's picture, that perhaps in that far-off home a mother whom I've got to tell more to than the official telegram will, will be saying these lines.

I'll try and go to brigade to-morrow to see him buried, so I can assure her that, as Brooks said, In the corner of some foreign field "that is forever England" the gentle little boy like herself sleeps. What I started out to write is all forgotten, so will close,

Love,

BILLY.

OCKER
MAY 5 1986